

**New St. James Presbyterian Church, London, Ontario**  
**Sunday, August 13, 2017**  
**Rev. Andrew Reid**  
**Genesis 37:1-4'12-28; Matthew 14:22-33**  
**“Up from the depths”**

Looking at the Old Testament text first: which was it? Was it a coat of many colours – the amazing technicolour dreamcoat of Andrew Lloyd Weber’s musical? If it was, then that would seem to show to the world that the wearer was prosperous, that he had enough money to spend the extra that coloured cloth would surely have cost. Or maybe, as in Joseph’s case, that his parents were the prosperous ones.

Or was it a *long robe with sleeves*? That’s what pretty much all of the more recent translations of Genesis 37:3 seem to agree on. If it was, then that would seem to suggest to the world that the wearer was in the position of not having to engage in manual labour, a man of enough wealth and social standing status that he could be a man of leisure.

Either way, whichever it was, the section of Genesis 37 that we did not read this morning tells of a series of dreams that Joseph had, in which he boasted that his older brothers – he was the youngest in the family – were all subservient to him.

So between his dreams, and his fancy coat, and the seemingly rather comfortable life that he enjoyed, and the way he told tales about his brothers to their father, and because he was so clearly their father’s favourite, he was not well-liked by his brothers. Which may explain, though it certainly doesn’t exactly justify, their plot to get rid of him when he showed up at Shechem to check up on them. At first, they plan to kill him, but in the end they are persuaded instead to throw him down a well, and then sell him into slavery. Of course, they still have to come up with a story to tell their father, but at least his blood would not be on their hands.

Now the Gospel text: what was it that got Jesus’ disciples so terrified? Surely it wasn’t just the storm. We know that at least four of them – Simon, Andrew, James and John – had worked on the Sea of Galilee. They had been fishermen before they became Jesus’ disciples, so they must have been used to the storm that could blow up quickly on the lake. The topography of the area made it prone to storms. It lies 212 metres below sea level, it is 21 km long and 13 km wide, with a maximum depth of only 43 metres, and the hills of what we now know as the Golan Heights rise to 600 metres immediately to the east. Storms could and still do blow up fast and furious on Galilee, and anyone who works on it must get used to that happening. All the same, Mark does say that on another occasion, when Jesus and the disciples were on a boat and a storm blew up, they were convinced they were about to die.

But in today’s text, it isn’t the storm that terrifies them, but the sight of Jesus early in the morning as he came walking towards them on the lake. They had last seen him on shore, when he had dismissed the crowd who had gathered to hear him, and sent the disciples on ahead across the lake by boat so that he could have some time to himself to spend in prayer. And now

here he was, walking on the water through the storm, coming to the disciples in their distress.

It is hard to imagine anyone missing the obvious lesson to be learned. Doing their best to do what Jesus tells them, a storm blows up, Jesus makes a strange and unexpected appearance, and reassures them. One of them wants to test things, so he takes an enormous leap of faith, leaving the safety of the boat and stepping out into the tumult of the storm. So long as he keeps his eyes on Jesus, he is fine, but when he takes his eyes off Jesus, he starts to sink. And it is only when he takes Jesus' hand that he is rescued. Jesus brings him to the safety of the boat. And the storm ceases.

If only things could have been resolved so quickly for Joseph. We know that they were ultimately resolved, but only after he spent time as a slave, as the victim of a trumped-up charge of sexual assault, imprisonment, more dreams, release from prison and an eventual and spectacular rise through Egyptian society to the position of pharaoh's prime minister. But even he could say at the end of it all, when he was reconciled with his brothers and met up with his father again, that he saw God's hand in it all, guiding his life and world affairs in such a way as to preserve the life of his family and the future of his people.

In his commentary on the Matthew text in *Feasting on the Word*, Clifford Kilpatrick writes this:

The key to faith and fullness of life in Christ is to follow Peter's example and be willing to step out of the comfort and security of the boat and head into the troubled waters of the world to proclaim the love, mercy and justice of God that we find in Jesus Christ. Being a disciple is a risky and exciting business, but that is exactly what God calls us to do and to be, and God assures us that if we "get out of the boat," we can count on the accompaniment of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

And he goes on to quote William H Willimon from a sermon entitled "How will you know it's Jesus?"

If Peter had not ventured forth, had not obeyed the call to walk on the water, then Peter would never have had this great opportunity for recognition of Jesus and rescue by Jesus. I wonder if too many of us are merely splashing about in the safe shallows and therefore have too few opportunities to test and deepen our faith. The story today implies that if you want to be close to Jesus, you have to venture forth out on the sea, you have to prove his promises by trusting his promises, through risk and venture.